

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 13, 2019

Agenda Item: Wall Creek WMA addition (R3)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes purchasing 11.4 acres of high-priority elk winter range to the northeast corner of the Wall Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (currently 7,197 acres) in the Madison Valley. The primary goal is to protect the integrity of this part of the WMA by avoiding a housing development and the associated disturbance of such developments to surrounding lands while also maintaining wintering habitat for elk and deer and year-round habitat for pronghorn.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has communicated with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition on this proposed project. There has been no other public involvement to date. Upon commission endorsement, FWP would conduct appropriate public review and analysis.

Alternatives and Analysis

The only alternative is to not pursue the opportunity to purchase these small parcels, which likely would result in residential development. Over the past five years, 2,100–2,700 elk have wintered on the Wall Creek WMA and surrounding lands. Past monitoring of radio-collared elk captured on the Wall Creek WMA demonstrated that elk wintering on the WMA distribute across the Gravelly, Greenhorn, Snowcrest, Sweetwater Hills, Blacktail, Centennial, and Henry Mountains during the snow-free months of the year (see maps). If one or both parcels were developed with residences, associated human disturbance would radiate onto adjacent WMA lands, potentially displacing wintering elk and impacting other wildlife habitat functions on the WMA. Development of residences in this area could also conflict with hunters and other public recreationists using the adjacent WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends commission endorsement of this proposal, allowing FWP to complete additional due diligence, environmental analysis, and public review processes to better understand the viability of this addition to the WMA. The parcels are entirely surrounded by WMA and BLM lands. The adjacent publicly managed habitats would be impacted if residences were established on these parcels.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission endorse this proposed addition to Wall Creek WMA, allowing FWP to conduct due diligence and associated habitat acquisition processes.